



*The Written Word the only Rule of Chri-  
stian Faith and Manners, and the great  
Duty of Individuals to study it,*

I N

Three Discourses.



THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF CHARLES THE FIRST

BY SAMUEL JOHNSON

IN THREE VOLUMES

LONDON

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I N

## THREE DISCOURSES.

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By A. TEMPLE, A. M.

MASTER of the FREE SCHOOL at Richmond, and  
VICAR of Eastby, Yorkshire.

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*"I am the light of the world; he that followeth me,  
"shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light  
"of life." JOHN, Chap. 8. Verse 12.*

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The SECOND EDITION.

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MDCCLXXII.

THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF LONDON

IN TWO VOLUMES

BY  
J. A. T. SMITH

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THE AUTHOR

THE SECOND EDITION

MANCHESTER: J. A. T. SMITH  
1851



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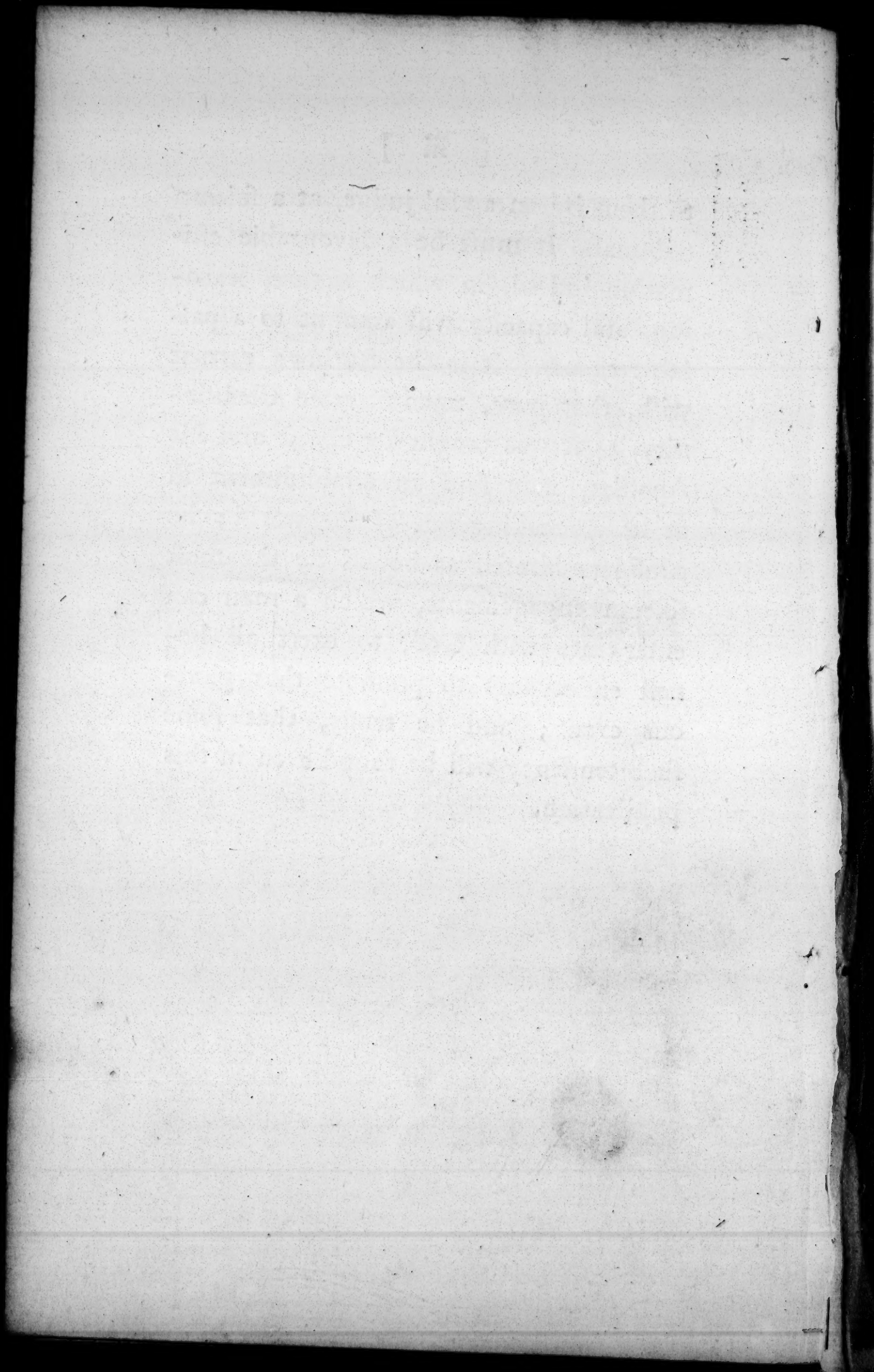
## ADVERTISEMENT.

**T**HE first of these Discourses was preached to a respectable meeting of Clergymen at a public visitation held at Richmond in Yorkshire, June 10th, 1766. It was the general request of that meeting, that it should be published; and the Author could not allow himself to dissent from their opinion, that it might be useful. It is now reprinted from the first edition; for which if it be necessary to give a reason, that will easily be suggested by the peculiar complexion of the times. If it had been now first written, it would perhaps have appeared in a somewhat different dress. The two following were composed for, and preached to, a country congregation; but being on a similar subject,  
may

may possibly be thought to strengthen and illustrate the main argument of the first. The Author is the less disposed to apologize for the publication of these, because he thinks the question, “standest thou, what thou readest,” can never be unimportant with respect to the scheme of everlasting salvation; and that it is at this time peculiarly seasonable. He has observed, with infinite surprize and concern, in some late writings of men of high stations and great abilities, what he cannot help thinking very glaring misapplications of scriptural expressions. He dares not suspect these Gentlemen of insincerity, as belying their own convictions; it is a miserable cause, which such arts are necessary to support: Nevertheless it would do even them no harm to consider their obligation to seek better information; and it will infinitely import them to provide some substantial answer to a similar question, which will sometime be put  
to



to them by an awful judge, at a solemn tribunal. It must be a favourable estimation indeed, in which leizure, learning, and capacity will amount to a passable excuse. It is the Author's earnest wish, that pure, unadulterated Christianity, as it was taught by Christ and his Apostles, may find an establishment in at least one kingdom of the world; he considers himself as bound by the most solemn engagements, which a man can enter into with God, to exert all honest endeavours to promote that glorious event; and he trusts, that some such tendency will be found even in this publication.





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T H E

Written Word, &c.

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*Think not, that I came to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.* MATT. Chap. x. Verse 34.

**O**F all the prophecies of the New Testament, there is not one, which may be put in competition with this, in respect of universal and notorious completion. Wherever the name of Christ has been named, and his gospel preached, this evidence of his divine commission hath more or less appeared in characters of blood; has been proclaimed, not as the blessed tidings of everlasting salvation seemed to require, with the voice of exultation, but with the solemn sounds of woe, and the groans of his expiring servant. The dearest bonds of human

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friendships and connections have been broken; *fathers have delivered their children to death, and children their fathers*; no act of barbarity can be imagined so shocking, no devastation so enormously complicated, which have not been perpetrated with greediness on the truest disciples of the meek and humble Jesus.

His gospel breathed the purest spirit of benevolence: Its direct tendency was to unite mankind in the dearest association; every member stands engaged, by the strongest motives, to love, to pity, to succour every other; and the bonds of christian brotherhood, if any thing could be effectual to hold the human heart, appear to be indissoluble. The precept is express, the sanction most awful, and the certainty of execution even demonstrative. The gospel calls upon its votaries to consider all mankind as children of the same family, as made of the same blood, as having a right to every affection which the nearest relation can inspire.

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mark



mark of the true Christian, that he *love his neighbour as himself; that he do good unto all men; that he revenge not himself; that he forgive his enemies*, and communicate his good things even to the unworthy. The reward of all this is immortality and glory, and the punishment of a failure the dreadful sentence of everlasting death.

That a religion so placid, so friendly to the social intercourse of mankind, should have been converted into an occasion of wars, treasons, assassinations and massacres, may perhaps, at first sight, appear not so accountable, as it is true in fact. If we look into the records of the christian revelation, we find nothing but love and peace, meekness, and the most passive spirit of forbearance: If we look into the histories of the world, since the commencement of christianity, almost every page is filled with horrid descriptions of bloody scenes, and the worst effects of furious resentment.

That such consequences were to follow,

could be little supposable by the first preachers of christianity. They conversed familiarly with their master, and were intimately acquainted with his gentleness and humility. If they had, upon occasion, expressed any bitterness at his opposers, they had been reproved with some severity, their mistaken notions rectified, and their hearts opened to the influences of love. Filled with the transporting idea of becoming instruments in the hand of providence, of making men the real friends of men, they could have little conception, that a religion, calculated on so gracious a plan, would be rejected with contempt; that in return for their message of benevolence, themselves should be treated with the most barbarous cruelty. Love, they could not be ignorant, generally excited love, and they would naturally expect to be received with open arms, with the readiest compliance. Such a mistake might have been fatal to their cause, an invincible discouragement in the prosecution of  
their



their ministry. It became necessary therefore, for their master to give them timely warning, to make them thoroughly sensible, that their road laid not so smooth before them ; that the very purity of the gospel would be found a main obstacle against the reception of it in the world.

He knew the temper of his own doctrine, and the infirmity and corruption of the human heart. The former was calculated to remedy the latter : And hence arose a natural opposition between them. It was necessary to weed out evil habits of long continuance, that stood in the way, and prevented man's salvation ; it was equally necessary to infuse new dispositions of a contrary tendency. This gave the alarm to all the unruly appetites. They rose up in arms together ; and being unable to resist the spirit of truth and wisdom, that spoke so powerfully in the gospel, by fair argument and deduction, attempted to crush it at once by open violence. Pride, ambition, avarice, and sen-

fuality were all equally averſe to reformation ; and though from different motives, joined heartily in what they thought an irrefiſtible alliance.

The Jew was vain of his deſcent from Abraham, and well ſatiſfied with his ceremonial righteouſneſs. The Pagan rejoiced in the commodiouſneſs of his ſyſtem, which afforded him as great hopes, as he aſpired to ; and at the ſame time allowed a free indulgence to every impulſe of his paſſions. Where religion was mere ceremony, it procured itſelf ſtrong attachments from the indolence of its votaries ; where it gave a free ſcope to the enjoyment of worldly emoluments and ſenſual pleaſures, it had ſtill ſtronger advocates in the heart. Now chriſtianity wanted both theſe attractions : It expoſed the vanity of external parade, and inſiſted on the utmoſt purity of conſcience, on an abſolute ſubjection of the appetites to a ſevere rule of life and diſcipline. Its profeſſors were cut off from many emoluments



ments, and many pleasures ; the road of salvation was contracted to a narrow path, and not to be travelled without much caution, circumspection, and laborious diligence.

Hence arose the first prejudices against it. The Jewish Rabbi and Pagan Priest availed themselves of these ; they saw how nearly their interests were affected, if christianity should prevail. The pomp and luxury of life, which they had hitherto enjoyed, and the respect and deference of their deluded votaries, would be utterly at an end. They applied themselves, therefore, to the passions of their people ; and by mixing artful insinuations, *that their craft was in danger*, that christianity would deprive them of their profit, as well as pleasure, fired their resentment to the highest degree of desperation.

Here the matter rested not long. It was not sufficient, that the Christian was exposed to the insult and derision, to the

resentment and fury of an irritated populace : It was founded in the ear of authority, that something was couched under this pretence, of dangerous consequence to the state. Monarchs were alarmed, and the harmless humble Christian was dragged from his retirement, from his communications with God and his own heart, to miserable execution. He, who was the ornament of the world, and the means of drawing down the blessings of providence upon his undeserving fellow-creatures, was condemned as the wretched author of destroying earthquakes, and all the dire calamities of nature ; and expired by the sentence of public law, as the vilest of malefactors. As these executions became general, the character of Christian became odious ; and Emperors, who had not virtue enough to entitle them to the human name, whose hearts were worse than brutal, truly diabolical, indulged their thirst of blood and massacre upon the inoffensive servants of Jesus ;  
because



because there they could indulge it with impunity: It gave no disgust to see a Christian die, except when his death approached not with all the circumstances of lengthened cruelty.

The true cause of these barbarous proceedings lay, as we have seen, in the natural antipathy which was found between the pure and reforming principles of the Gospel, and the obstinacy of a corrupted, and dissolute world. This cause, however, was not to be avowed; and one, plausible enough to captivate the approbation of an unthinking multitude, was speedily invented to supply its deficiencies. With what pretence, it was asked, were these men wiser, than their ancestors? The religion of different countries had been long established; the wisdom of many generations had approved the original plan; and was it not intolerable arrogance for private men, men perhaps of the lowest education and weakest talents, to controvert the maxims of philosophers;

to

to decline a rule, which statesmen, kings, and emperors had enacted with the fullest approbation? It might however have been replied, that the case was merely personal, that it had no connection with their obedience as subjects, nor could at all affect any relation of life, otherwise than by rendering them most amiable, and most perfect in discharging every duty.

If there is any such thing as religion in the world, it must be a first principle of it, that it finally promote some material happiness of individuals. Take away this sanction, and no other remains powerful enough to enforce obedience: Whatever else may come in aid, yet the great stress must lie upon this alone: No person can be obliged to any observance, which has not some tendency to benefit himself. If others are to receive the whole reward, what reason can compel me to toil in accomplishing the discipline? If human reason is capable of discovering any truth, it concludes



concludes this with the fullest conviction. But it stops not here. If religion be a personal concern, affecting only individuals in its consequences, surely he, who is to receive the reward, or bear the punishment, is most highly interested in judging of the evidence, and of the doctrines. He can be convinced no farther than as he sees the one, nor edified, but in proportion as he understands the other. To require him to act by another man's ideas is treating him as no moral agent, nor capable of account. If he is to follow blindly as he is led; for any knowledge he has himself, he may be treading the direct contrary road; and can it be supposed to avail him at the last, that he gave his hand to a blind guide? When he lies groveling and maimed in the pit, will it alleviate his punishment, or merit compassion, that he was too indolent to examine for himself, or too lukewarm to dread so probable a consequence?

We need not, therefore, have recourse  
to

to the gospel to justify our condemnation of heathen persecutors. They acted in express contradiction to the first maxim of human reason; and having extinguished their own light, murdered their fellow-creatures for not following their example. Thus are they inexcusable on the plain evidence of common sense. They might have seen, and they ought to have practised truths so universally discoverable, and written by the pen of nature, on the heart of man: But their prejudices and partialities, and above all their attachments to sensual pleasures and worldly interests; their backwardness to reform corrupt appetites, and that natural aversion, which the heart feels against instruction, confounded all their ideas, and represented christianity under the odious colours of a dangerous imposture.

This scene, however, changed at last, Christians obtained the power, and kingdoms and empires arose under christian governors. May we here look for a  
brighter



brighter prospect? Had Christ now no enemies, when a large part of the known world had received the gospel, and allowed it the evidence of a divine revelation? How were Christians affected by this great change? Did *Kings*, in fact, become *their nursing fathers*, and *Queens their nursing mothers*? Alas, the names of their persecutors were changed; but the persecution continued with equal bitterness, and equal obstinacy. It was soon found, that something more than a bare profession, was necessary, to give the gospel full effect; that the mildest and most benevolent religion is nothing but a dead letter, if men are too indolent or too selfish to apply it; to regulate their conduct by its maxims; to imbibe its gentle spirit, to incorporate the habits it is calculated to infuse, with the very substance of their minds.

A great part of mankind had taken up christianity on the same principles, as they had before admitted paganism: It had been the religion of their ancestors,  
and

and was now the religion of the times. The profession of it was become fashionable, and the pass-port to worldly emoluments. It was little understood, how slenderly this religion is connected with the world. Whatever became of future prospects, it seemed reasonable to procure present advantages. For this every passion of the heart exerted all its rhetoric ; ambition, avarice, self-conceit, *the lust and pride of life*, claimed again to be heard ; they spoke again with the force and violence of a tempest, and the soft whispers and *still voice* of the gospel, which nothing but a perfect calm can render audible, were stifled in the tumult. That as far as possible, they might never be heard, artful or mistaken men invented commodious interpretations of scripture ; speculative opinions were drawn from the rotten systems of pagan philosophy, and engrafted on the pure and simple word of Jesus Christ. These were proclaimed and enforced as the essence of christianity ;  
and



and because they flattered the indolence and selfishness of mankind, were received with greediness by the weak, the prejudiced, and the interested. The same passions, which ministred occasion to their rise, stood up together in their defence. The multitude were held steady to the devotion of their leaders, and the gospel-sanctions, which had been ineffectual to purify their manners, were now urged with success, and inspired them with madness against their unoffending brethren. Persecution grew quickly to gigantic size, and emboldened by the number of her abettors, doomed whole nations at a time to utter extirpation.

If heathen persecutors stood condemned by the light of nature, what shall we say to the merciless Christian, who triumphs in the agonies of an expiring brother? Let us call upon him for his authority. If he is able to produce none, let us venture to inform him of a few principles of that meek religion, which his barbarity dishonours.

dishonours. *Judge not, that ye be not judged ; let the wheat and the tares grow together till the harvest ; every man shall give an account for his deeds done in the flesh ; to his own master he standeth or falleth ; ye know not, what manner of spirit you are of, says the Lord of all christian potentates, when his ministers were for calling down fire to revenge an affront put upon their master ; vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord ; and may man invade a province, thus solemnly vindicated to the Almighty ? Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath ; forgive your enemies ; love them that hate and persecute you ; stand fast in the liberty, with which Christ hath made you free. Let us remind him of this memorable decision of his Lord ; Be not ye called Rabbi ; for one is your master, even Christ ; and all ye are brethren : and call no man Father upon earth, for one is your Father, which is in heaven : neither be you called masters ; for one is your master, even Christ.*

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In such an audience it is needless to observe the peculiar emphasis of the original word here translated master. No Christian teacher can be ignorant, that it imports Leader, Guide, Director; and that the prohibition lies against the interposition of human authority, and refers the judgment of every individual to the cognizance of Christ himself. Let us suppose therefore the great day of final account to be arrived, and the persecuted, and their persecutors brought face to face before the righteous *judge of all the earth*. How shall the latter make their defence, when they are commanded to view the mangled bodies of their murdered brethren? Shall they alledge their zeal and their ardour in God's cause? Shall not the gracious Judge, who has engaged to maintain the cause of his injured servants, point them to these express declarations of his word? Shall he not point them to the meekness and moderation of his own example, and convince them, by the fe-

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verity

verity of his sentence, of the great folly of *being wise above that, which was written?* While this awful scene is before our eyes, let us turn our thoughts to that oppressive human power, foretold by the Apostle, and exercised now, and for ages over so large a majority of the christian world; where a temporal Hierarchy domineers over the consciences of men; where religious slavery is established by law; and where it is impossible to prosecute the concerns of a future life, without giving up every comfort, without incurring every misery of this.

This is the lamentable case of almost all our neighbouring nations, and that it is not ours, is owing first to the merciful providence of a good God, and under him, to the noble spirit of some few of our glorious Ancestors. The flame of persecution rode triumphantly through our land, till it was in a great measure extinguished by the blood of our Cranmers, our Ridleys, and our Latimers. The evil  
however



however was not totally abolished till another age: Some mistakes in their conduct, excusable, indeed, in men of their times and their education, left the monster still alive; the venom fermented afresh, and wrought much sorrow to their nearest successors. Flames, it is true, were more seldom kindled, but some wretches lost their lives, and many innocent men, what was equally valuable, their reputation, and every comfort of their lives. A protestant Clergy had not learned the first principle of true protestantism, that christianity is entirely personal, that its reward is in another world, and the trial of it at a future tribunal. Men would still be called masters, and took the judgment out of the hands of their great Lord. The sting of persecution was, however, drawn at length; but let it be spoken with deep regret, the Clergy in general were not the most forward to promote so desirable an event. We owe it chiefly to the mild wisdom of a great King, and the public

spirit of his patriot Ministers : They rescued the state from civil slavery, and to render that blessing truly valuable, laid a foundation for religious liberty by the glorious act of Toleration.

I have been, perhaps, too long in this detail : If I have been thought tedious, give me leave to urge my excuse. It appeared of the utmost importance, that the gentle spirit of christianity should be seen in its true light ; and that the motives on which persecution began, and the maxims on which it was defended, should, at the same time, be exhibited in all their horrors. If there be any truth in the foregoing observations, will it not be the duty of a protestant Clergy to wipe off all unfavourable aspersions, that may have been cast on their profession, and to which it cannot be denied, some occasion has been minister'd ? In all times, and in all nations, the Clergy have been recorded as no friends to religious liberty. They have written, they have disputed,  
they



they have contended ; nay, they have sometimes fought ; they have irritated Kings and States to engage all the powers of their exalted station in favour of speculative opinions ; opinions, of which some can have little, and more no influence at all on the heart, and of which accordingly little or no account shall be taken at the final judgment. It has fortuned too, that these opinions were generally such, as had temporal emoluments attached to them, and therefore tended to encrease suspicion. None of us are ignorant, that this was too much the case in times not very distant in our own kingdom, and perhaps some of us can reckon ancestors, who felt the bitter consequences of this narrow spirit ; and probably we ourselves are still affected by them. If we have fallen on better times, and milder manners, we have reason to thank providence, which has delivered us from the fiery trial, and expects from us tempers and

affections fuitable to its own gracious designs.

The act of Toleration has wrought for us blessed effects: It curbed the turbulent fervor of the Zealot, and his peevish zeal languished gradually; the fire was smothered in the heart; and because it was not allowed to blaze, caught not the succeeding generation. Different conceptions of christianity were entertained, because men began to learn it from the gospel. It was impossible to study and to meditate on the words of the blessed Jesus, but they must inspire kindred sentiments; and the consequence has been, that the more the gospel was understood, the more the spirit of free enquiry was exerted, the more men's eyes were opened, and their hearts enlarged. A comfortable prospect to succeeding ages! What good man wishes not to live, till he see all the canker of former prejudices absolutely purged away; and hear every minister of the gospel boasting, that he has

no



no principles, but what are justified by the express declarations of his Lord, and drawn immediately from the sacred fountain of infallible truth ; that he has no dependence on the precarious determinations of frail men, and that *his father and his master are in heaven ?*

The contemplation of such a prospect must be truly ravishing to a generous mind : But, my brethren, bear with me, if I speak freely. We have still some reason for apprehension. Some part of the old leaven still appears to remain and to work. Do we not still hear men branded with odious names, because they have obeyed the summons of the gospel, and called *no man Father upon earth* ; because they have read, and judged and determined for themselves, in compliance with the strongest obligation, which can be imposed, a peremptory command to receive the rule of salvation from his mouth only, who can teach it truly ? The appellations of Heretic and Schismatic, of

Arian and Socinian, and many more of little meaning, but great malevolence, are not yet utterly laid aside ; and, though in this mild government, more fatal consequences cannot follow, yet are they sometimes highly prejudicial to the dearest temporal interests of mankind. If they mean any thing, they mean to exhibit those, to whom they are applied, as the enemies of Christ, and the objects of his vengeance. But before we venture to render our brethren so hard a measure, let us pause for a moment's consideration. Is not this actually precluding the judgment of our master, and constituting ourselves judges, of what none but God can know, the secrets of the heart? Do we not still run a greater risk? May we not condemn, whom he has not condemned; may we not curse, whom he hath blessed? Let us suppose the imputation to be true; will any of the principles of these men exclude them from the kingdom? If not,  
how



how highly dangerous is our uncharitable judgment?

This matter may be brought to the fullest determination. *Every spirit*, says St. John, *that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God*; and again, *whoever shall confess, that Jesus is the son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God*. And again St. Paul, *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth, that Jesus is the Christ, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God raised him from the Dead, thou shalt be saved*. What shall we say to these express testimonies? Surely here is nothing, which may exclude any man, who has any faith in revelation at all. This is the single point of mere faith, which the gospel has made necessary; and if we will presume to make additions, and cast stumbling blocks in the way of salvation, do we not *preach another Gospel*, and aspire to more knowledge than Christ has condescended to impart? Our own speculations let us keep to ourselves; they may possibly minister

ster to our comfort, and our spiritual improvement; but we may not impose them on the brethren. If that had been necessary, Christ, who knew the whole will of his Father, needed not our explanations to make it understood.

Let us, my brethren, exert our whole endeavours to teach christianity in the same purity and simplicity, with which Christ taught it. Let us convince our hearers, that we usurp no dominion over their consciences; that we are zealous, not for our own opinions or emoluments, but for their salvation, and the honour of our Redeemer. Let us instruct them, that unfruitful faith of any kind will avail nothing at all to secure their future welfare, and that the narrow path can be travelled with success, and the strait gate opened by no means, but the strict discipline of the gospel; that mercy, benevolence, and mutual forbearance are the great badges of the christian covenant,  
and



and that, *whofoever loveth his brother, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.*

If Christianity had always been preached on this plan, no hatred, no malice, nor rancour of one Christian to another, could ever have been found in the world ; and if we neglect the opportunity, which providence has in these times graciously afforded, if we neglect to cultivate and improve the amiable spirit of lenity and charity, which has already made no small progress in our land ; let us reflect into what barbarity we may again degenerate ; that it is still possible for the miseries of former times to return, that the Demon of persecution may still start forth, and stalk at the head of armies, scattering firebrands, tortures, and death.

It is the first principle of the religion of Jesus, and our reformers wisely made it a main principle of the English establishment, that “ Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation :  
“ So that whatsoever is not read therein,  
“ nor

“ nor may be proved thereby, is not to  
 “ be required of any man, that it should  
 “ be believed as an article of Faith, or be  
 “ thought requisite or necessary to salva-  
 “ tion.” Here, certainly, they ought to  
 have stopped. But they went farther,  
 and therefore made room for cavil and  
 angry disputation, which have since so  
 greatly whetted the spleen of assailants  
 and defendants, and banished all chris-  
 tian meekness from their writings, and  
 their actions. They acted however glo-  
 riously for their times, and so far as they  
 saw the Truth, valiantly jeopardied their  
 lives in its defence. As we have more  
 light, our obligation is the greater to re-  
 move obstructions, and to leave no *la-  
 bour of love* unattempted to compleat their  
 work.

I am now speaking from the sincerest  
 conviction of my own mind ; and think  
 also I have done myself justice by the  
 coolest examination of the scriptures. If  
 I am mistaken, bear with me in the spirit  
 of



of meekness: I ask no more, than I am most ready to grant. If any man suspects me of wanting reverence to such excellent men, he does me great wrong. I reverence them, as the greatest of my benefactors, and am most thankful to providence, that I was born in a Kingdom, where their fortitude had laid open the fountain of life, and given every man free access to the oracles of Truth. After all they were but men, and their expositions have no greater authority, than fallible understandings could impart. When these stand in competition with divine decrees, no man can, no man dares doubt, that the latter solely are of moment. If they had been less liberal of their decisions, there is every reason to suppose, that fewer bickerings and animosities would have followed: We might have hoped before this time, not only to have seen the sword sheathed, but all acrimony of spirit, all intemperate zeal entirely laid aside; and the church settled into a state of peace  
and

and mutual charity. For all the quarrels, which have mangled christian unity, have arose from an assuming spirit of men, to impose their own sense upon the rest of their fellow-christians. It was not wonderful however, that they saw not all things clearly. They were just awaked from the heavy sleep of popish darkness, and the eye unhabituated to the light, admits it with caution and reserve; otherwise they must have seen, that other men were born with reason and understanding, and had an equal right to examine, as themselves: They must have seen the consequence of their own maxim, “that scripture alone was to be decisive “in matters of Faith;” and they needed no information, that religion is entitled to no reward, but in proportion to the sincerity of our assent from the conviction of our conscience.

Will it be said, that this reasoning will render subscriptions unnecessary, and leave Christianity exposed, by removing  
the



the bulwarks of national establishments ? I will not dissemble my sentiments. I believe I shall one day be accountable for what I now say, or leave unsaid ; and sure I am, I have no view but to serve the cause of our common Saviour and Redeemer. I can see no harm Christianity would receive, if fewer subscriptions were required, nor can understand, what security any human bond can give to it. Is it not founded on the adamantine rock of God's word, which no human force can undermine ; and from which the weapons of all assailants must ineffectually recoil ? Are not all questions finally to be tried by the single test of scripture ? And why should men be sent thither with minds lost and bewildered in human speculations, or prejudiced against the truth by human authority ? Was not the Almighty able to unfold his own mind, or does he need the feeble aid of finite abilities to direct his infinite and incomprehensible wisdom ? What right had our  
ancestors

ancestors to preclude our improvements and discoveries ; what right have we to prescribe to our successors?

Science of all kinds is progressive ; like the human mind, of which it is the object, it shall never arrive at perfection upon earth ; never can it be said, this is all man shall know. Christianity has this in common with other sciences ; every age adds something to the discoveries of the preceeding ; and the correction of human errors will probably be found an important exercise of the talents of mankind to the end of time. Hence it is, that though the avowed design of our public constitutions be to prevent “diversities of opinions,” yet a considerable part of them are admitted by very few in the sense of the original compilers ; that almost every man has an interpretation of his own : Hence, the necessity of allowing this latitude, if we would not deprive the church of its ablest and most liberal Defenders.

Let



Let this teach us the necessity of mutual forbearance: It is of small consequence, by what particular names we are here called, if we be indeed the ministers of Christ. He had no partial views in the publication of his Gospel, and has taught us to love as brethren, all who receive and practise it. All Christians are members of the same family, all of one brotherhood, with Christ at their head: He distinguishes them not, as followers of *Paul*, of *Apollos*, of *Cephas*. Wherever the heart is truly warmed, and the affections purified by the discipline of the gospel, every man has an equal share in his love. Let it be the glory of a British protestant Clergy to act on the same enlarged plan. Let their hearts dilate with benevolence, and their arms be open to receive every obedient servant of their master, into whatsoever sect the circumstances of this world have thrown him. Let not our sentiments be contracted by party-prejudices. We have a test to distinguish

D tistinguish

tinguish the true follower of Christ; if he cooperate sincerely with us in diffusing the benevolent temper of the gospel; if he regulate his actions by the severity of gospel morality, purity and temperance; if he believe, that Christ died, and rose again, to rescue sinners from perdition; if he expect Christ's second coming to execute the sanctions of his law; to such an one let us freely hold forth *the right hand of fellowship*: If he is in some points mistaken, or we suppose him to be mistaken, let us judge him charitably, knowing, that Christ has mercy, and that he will bestow it, where, perhaps, we have little conception. Be this the glory of every minister of Christ. Then shall we see Christianity flourish, as it is in truth, in the fruits of love, righteousness, and peace, and receive a foretaste of that supereminent felicity, which the blessed shall inherit, when they shall compose the brotherhood of the faithful and sanctified in Heaven.

*Under-*



*Understandest thou, what thou readest?*

ACTS, Chap. viii. Verse 30.

WHEN we consider, how ready a profession is made by Christians in general, and by each in particular, of their admitting the Divine Authority of the sacred records, and the reality of the divine inspiration, by which they were given; one would be tempted to believe, that, amongst all that Infinity of Professors, a single man could not be found, who had not studied them with the closest application. One would hope to find the most familiar acquaintance, with the Doctrines of the blessed Jesus, in every person, who calls himself by his sacred name, who expects from him redemption from Sin, and from *Death, the Wages,* and Consequence of Sin. It is most natural to suppose, that every claimant of these precious promises will assure him-

self, whether they do not depend on certain conditions ; and if so, what those important conditions are. Neglect in these points, to an unprejudiced mind, must appear inexcusable ; and if precision is attainable, he seems not unworthy of his fate, who miscarries by the failure of his own diligence.

If it should appear, that God has afforded plentiful means of information, that he has fully justified his own wisdom and goodness, by the declaration of *his whole counsel*, that he *has kept back nothing*, necessary either to satisfy the enquirer's mind, or to whet his industry in the application of his discoveries ; if this should appear (as upon trial it certainly will) how astonishing must it, at the same time, appear, that there are, not a few individuals, not here and there a thoughtless man ; but, perhaps, a majority of Christians in profession, who know no more of Christ, than the name ; who look for redemption at his hands,  
without



without knowing that he has appointed them a law to direct their actions, and a discipline, with which the wretched plea of wilful ignorance will surely not move him to dispense.

When I say perhaps a majority, I mean not to exaggerate the fact. I should be extremely sorry to entertain, or to propagate uncharitable sentiments of my brethren; and to be convinced of my mistake, would be matter of the truest exultation. But, alas! a slight survey of the world, and of the practices exercised in, and authorised by it, will effectually acquit me of rash censure. For not to mention the poor deluded Papist, who trusts in his priest for absolution, and has done enough, if he performs his ridiculous penance; who dares not open his bible to be instructed, that Christ calls upon him to read and understand for himself; that he ought to be no man's slave; but as the son of that *Father*, and the servant of that *Master*, *who*

*is in heaven*, always to be ready to receive his instructions and commands ; not to mention, I say, the votaries of this cruel and ungodly superstition, which has spread an Egyptian darkness over so many kingdoms of the earth, we may have abundant conviction in our own country, how little hold the religion of Jesus Christ has on the hearts of men.

That there are among us some notorious instances of wickedness and folly, he, who will deny, must be ridiculously ignorant. That these instances are neither few nor uncommon, the least curious observer will be convinced. For if the question should be put to every man's own heart, and he were called to answer as in the presence of God, would he not allow, that they are shockingly abundant ? Are the Liar, the Slanderer, the Covetous, the Extortioner, the Oppressor, and the Merciless, rare characters ; or does any exercise of benevolence appear in these ? Yet Christianity has been called a religion of  
love



love and brotherly affection. Do not drunkenness, revelling and dissipation, the profanation of God's tremendous name, almost continually wound our eyes and ears? Do the perpetrators of these detestable enormities blush at the commission of them; or meet with that discountenance and rebuke, which a religion of sobriety and holiness ought certainly to suggest? Let us take into the account that filthy talking, which is now so very common, and considered as the zest of conversation, which so naturally disposes the mind to receive infection, and accounts for that overflowing of lewdness and uncleanness. Is this that purity, which we are told is the essence of Christianity, a religion established on the most awful sanctions, and which brings man to his *answer for every idle word*?

Let us, therefore, carefully consider what we do; let us take the precepts of the gospel along with us, and be certain, that we understand them. If these prac-

tices are blameless, if they are allowed and authorized by our religion, let us go on boldly, and without restraint ; nothing can harm us, to which the Creator of the universe gives his permission and authority. But if the severest penalties are denounced on every one of them ; if they will draw down upon us the vengeance of a righteous God, and the forfeiture of everlasting happiness and glory ; if they lead directly to the horrid regions of eternal death, let us stop our career for one moment, till we have well weighed the consequence.

It is never too early to learn the will of our Almighty and all-righteous Master ; and that will can be learned only from the gracious revelation of it, which he laid open to all men, and which to us is still open. If any man perish therefore, let him not blame God, who has given him directions, and called him solemnly to learn and understand them ; let him not blame his spiritual guides  
and



and teachers, who, however remiss they may be in their duty, still leave him the sacred volume; where he may find the infallible guidance of his Saviour, and where the oracles of truth speak the pure language of salvation.

Whosoever therefore perisheth, as his own executioner, is without excuse: But most are they without excuse, who, when they are called, hear not; who stop their ears to the awful summons, and perish wilfully and resolutely ignorant, what that good and perfect will of the Lord is. To meditate on this most interesting lesson, I invite you all; be not among the scoffers and despisers; receive the legacy of your dying Redeemer; take up his laws with grateful reverence, with earnest desires, and aspirations for improvement; and in order to excite the most wakeful attention, let every man conceive, while he holds the gospel in his hands, that he hears the voice of God, questioning him in the words of the Apostle, and demanding,

manding, *Understandest thou, what thou readeſt ?*

This is indeed a queſtion, that every man might ſeem diſpoſed to put frequently to himſelf, who, while he reads the ſcriptures, conſiders himſelf as examining the will of his God and Creator. The inconceivable Maſteſty, and the no leſs inconceivable Goodneſs of the Lawgiver, have a powerful tendency to call forth all the faculties of the human underſtanding ; and to put it on its guard againſt inadvertence and miſapprehenſion. Nothing, we may be ſure, trifling and inſignificant can proceed from the ſource of all goodneſs and wiſdom ; nothing not highly intereſting to our deareſt concerns, from the fountain of ineffable benevolence ; but for man's ſake alone was the law given, and his muſt be the whole benefit of obedience. God, all-perfect in himſelf, can receive no addition of happineſs, whether *we will hear his voice, or whether we will forbear* ; but man has  
nothing,



nothing, but what he receives from God, and the gracious giver certainly has a right to prescribe the conditions of his favours ; and we have assurance in his goodness, that the conditions will be as gentle, and as righteous, as the most gracious purpose can allow.

When God issues his decree, that man shall regulate his conduct by a particular rule, and refers him to a written system, where all the ordinances of his government are contained ; what an insult is it to his glorious Majesty, for man to reject his sovereignty ; to defy the arm that made him, and *set at nought his counsels* ? Will he hope for impunity in such aggravated rebellion ; and shall he not be convinced, that God's ordinance shall stand ; that there is no alternative, but on man's part submission, or on God's exemplary correction ? However refractory man may be, God will execute the sanctions of his government ; and from God's hand nothing can deliver. His power is infinite,  
and

and cannot be evaded; his justice immutable, and can suffer no infringement. Whoever presumes that he shall be overlooked, let him consider the boldness of such presumption. The eye and the arm of God shall find him, and bring him in to the general order; as he has the completest right to absolute obedience, it is absurd to suppose, that he will not vindicate it effectually; and it is better to be his voluntary subject, than the scourged victim of his anger.

Thus would the obligation to receive, to study, and understand a divine revelation, be exceeding powerful, if we considered only God's uncontrollable sovereignty and greatness; but when his milder attributes of love, goodness, and mercy, are taken into the account, how greatly is the obligation strengthened? How foolish must the man appear, who neglects a revelation which proceeds from mercy, goodness, and love; which can have no end, but human happiness, and prescribes



prescribes nothing not tending to that gracious end? Let us suppose a man ever so unwilling to submit to a sovereign ruler; yet when it is known, that it is impossible to withdraw himself; that he must conform, if not from a conviction of his duty, yet from hard necessity, which will not yield, will not common prudence teach such a man the eligible part? But when it is known, that this Sovereign Ruler is a God of gentleness, tenderness, and everlasting love towards all his creatures; that he imposes nothing arbitrarily, merely as an exercise of authority; but that all his laws are calculated on the most benevolent plan; and that the acceptance of, and obedience to them is the surest, the only sure means of human happiness; what words shall we find to describe that man's absurdity, who refuses to be happy, because God commands him; who chuses to take the road of misery and destruction, because

God

God points out one, that leads to assured comfort and felicity ?

Yet, my brethren, many there are, who are thus extravagantly absurd ; many there are, who, with the book of God in their possession, are walking in the ways of Satan ; who will not read, or, if they do read, will not understand, what are those pure and undefiled ways, which lead to life and salvation. It is in vain to deny the fact ; if our eyes are open, we must see them ; cruel prosecutors of their own revenge, fornicators, adulterers, hypocrites, who hide internal deformity beneath the deceitful cloak of a fair and smooth outside, who have all equally stopped their ears to the voice of the Gospel ; or what is far worse, judged it unworthy of their regard, and deliberately slighted the authority of him, who enacted the prohibition.

Let us charitably suppose, that there are none such in this congregation. God grant the supposition may be true ; but  
if



if there are, let them stand forth in the presence of him, who knows all their actions, however secret, and all their thoughts, however buried in obscurity. Suppose the God, in whose presence they are, should thus instantly call them to account; "have you read and meditated  
 "on my law; have you endeavoured to  
 "understand, and do *all my good plea-*  
*"sure?"* Would they answer in the affirmative? Let him then be supposed to interrogate them still farther: "Where  
 "found you it written, thou shalt avenge  
 "thyself, thou shalt defile thyself with  
 "harlots, thou shalt commit adultery,  
 "thou shalt wear the mask of hypo-  
 "crisy?" If to these interrogatories they could frame no other possible answer, except that indeed they had not been careful to understand God's commands, we may easily conceive, how little the answer would avail them, and the horrors that would shake them, when the affronted Sovereign should proceed to condemnation.

Happy

Happy would it be for us all, if we cultivated an habit of putting these interrogatories to ourselves ; if we perpetually reflected, that God is noting all our misdeeds in his book ; and that we shall one day be examined, not in imagination, but in serious reality, before the vast assembly of the quickened dead, and glorious angels, by the righteous *Judge of all the earth*, on the subject of our conformity to his will ; that the sentence shall be pronounced with a strict regard to such conformity, and condemnation follow every perverse warping of actions, words, or thoughts.

The tremendous solemnity of this last scene we ought continually to anticipate in contemplation, and it will supply the strongest incentive of our diligence to understand the law of life. It holds forth to us sanctions, worthy of the infinitely just and gracious God, who enacted the law ; with which he hath declared there shall be no dispensation ; sanctions, that  
on



on one side must fill the mind with rapturous aspirations, and, on the other, with the most agonizing terror. We here find, that the reward of the faithful, and the penalty of the disobedient, shall not end with this transitory life. The latter shall suffer more than the fullen gloom, which necessarily hangs over the mind of him, who fears the chastisement of an offended Sovereign; and the former has other pleasures in reversion, than those, which result from a consciousness of duty faithfully performed, from his assurance of living in the favour and protection of a gracious God. A scene opens endless in prospect, and filled with every thing capable of affecting the human heart. Life and immortality is on one side, successive ages of glory and felicity; on the other everlasting death in punishments inconceivably severe.

If these sanctions will not rouse man's attention to the law, and to the precept, surely nothing will. The heart, which

E

endless

endless glory cannot warm, nor God's unlimited vengeance terrify, has lost all feeling, and it will be in vain to press it farther. But surely, my brethren, this can be the case of very few; such an exceeding degree of hardness must be very rare. Let us give no room to surmise, that any of us are so desperately incorrigible. Let us from this moment be convinced of the great duty of understanding the glorious Gospel, and steadily resolved to discharge it effectually. Let its doctrines become familiar, not to our mouths only, but to our hearts; let the dispositions these were intended to inspire, strike root in us, and bring forth all their fruits. This only is understanding with effect: To call ourselves by the name of Christians, without a proper sense of our obligation, and relation to Christ; to intrude into the Christian Brotherhood, with the unpurified affections of Pagans and unbelievers; to claim the precious promises of the Gospel under a  
 stupid



stupid ignorance of what is promised, or what required ; to obstruct and to prevent the progress of the pure christian spirit, by an undisciplined conversation ; to poison the manners of the thoughtless and the young, by a dissolute example ; from rooted and unexamined prejudice to denounce hostility against the truth ; this may be wicked and coward sluggishness, it may be foul hypocrisy, it may be shameful presumption ; but it is not that blessed work of faith, arising from assured conviction, which exhibits the Discipline, the sanctification, the source and everlasting sanctions of the gospel to the eye of the triumphant believer.

You see, what we shall lose, if we understand not the excellency of our vocation ; and surely, if we are men, we shall aspire to still higher elevation ; which, if we obtain not, we must sink to a level with a race of degenerated beings, whom God and nature point out to us, as objects of abhorrence.

E 2

*Under-*

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*Understandest thou, what thou readeſt?*

ACTS, Chap. 8. Verſe 30.

YOU are, I hope, not unconvinced of the obligation that is upon every profeſſor of the religion of Jeſus Chriſt, to aſſure himſelf with the utmoſt preciſion of the true import of the terms of the covenant of eternal life; that it is an obligation, which it is impoſſible to avoid, and which carries with it the moſt convincing evidence. The next enquiry will be, how this full aſſurance may be obtained; what means may be effectual, and what fort of diligence will be exacted from us.

And here we need not be long at a loſs; the means are at hand. When we put the queſtion to ourſelves, “underſtandeſt thou, what thou readeſt,” we need not reply with the good Eunuch, “how can I, except ſome one  
“ ſhall



“shall guide me?” In the study of the gospel covenant, and the application of its terms, every sincere enquirer has the guide in his own *honest and good heart*, in his reverence for the holy spirit of God, which *shall be with us* in the scriptures *to the end of the world*, and which shall still be granted to every one, who intreats the Father with due importunity. It would be wonderful indeed, if the father of wisdom, who planted the human faculties, could not speak intelligibly to the minds, which he formed, and more wonderful, if his spirit could not prevent every dangerous deviation.

If all be right on our part, there is no fear of any material error ; and, for this reason, the religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of individuals ; for the due improvement of which every man is singly answerable to his great master, and shall singly be brought to account according to his particular abilities, and opportunities.

When we are called to judgment for failures and deviations, it will be in vain alledged, that we followed this, or that name of authority; or attached ourselves to the interpretation of this teacher, or the decisions of that system. The judge will reply, “ It was plainly written in the “ book of my commandments, *call no man “ father, call no man master upon earth.* “ It was written, *they shall be all taught of “ God*; and if through indolence, through “ aversion to enquiry, if through an idle “ persuasion, that God’s infallible direc- “ tion was insufficient, you preferred an “ earthly master, you must abide by the “ consequence. *To your own master you “ were to stand, or fall,* and you were “ accountable to no human tribunal for “ the impressions, which the faithful study of my laws might make upon your “ minds; and if you had exerted your “ best endeavours, *you would have been “ accepted according to what was given.* “ But if you followed at a venture the  
first



“ first fanciful leader, that fell in your  
 “ way, this is inexcusable rashness ; and  
 “ if your leader falls, you must be con-  
 “ tented to fall with him. If you dared  
 “ not to believe me, that *my father would*  
 “ *love him that should keep my words, and*  
 “ *that we would come unto him, and make*  
 “ *our abode in him ; that the holy spirit*  
 “ *should lead him into all truth ; how*  
 “ shameless is it now to claim those blef-  
 “ sings, which were promised to those  
 “ only, who should have courage, *for my*  
 “ *sake, to forsake father and mother, wife*  
 “ *and children, nay, even to lay down*  
 “ *their lives for the testimony of the*  
 “ truth.”

It is a melancholy consideration, that  
 Christianity has never yet been generally  
 regarded in its true light, as the private  
 concern of every particular man ; as an  
 affair between God alone, and our own  
 consciences. This mistake has been an  
 inconceivable obstruction to the blessed  
 consequences, that must otherwise have

followed from it. This chiefly has dammed up the streams of benevolence, and prevented its diffusion from heart to heart. For while every man was conceited of the way of his party, and found himself supported by a multitude equally stiff, and conceited as himself; while each was warmly industrious to defend his system, and considered all arguments as conclusive, which party had adopted; while distinguishing creeds were enforced by persecution; while they were learned with avidity, and it was taken for granted, that the gospel must speak conformably to these; while the case was thus, it was very natural that prejudices should be confirmed; that animosities should spring up, and derive great vexation upon many, who might, perhaps, have strong reasons for their separation.

No man would then take a weak brother by the hand, nor, with the mild spirit of the gospel, convince him of his mistake; or, if that was impossible, bear with



with him in love. The interest and honour of the party became the leading motive ; and the view being earthly, was best promoted by earthly means. Heat of temper, and want of charity, were the offspring of the degenerated zeal ; which, if it had been grounded on gospel principles, and exercised with the true meekness and humility of Jesus Christ, must have wrought the conversion of infinite numbers, and brought them in safety to the general sheepfold.

This would have been acting in conformity to the gracious purposes of God himself, *who is no respecter of persons*, and hath declared his *acceptance* of every man, *who feareth him, and worketh righteousness*. If, therefore, we have discovered the great impediment, which hath hitherto weakened the effects of the gospel, or diverted them into a wrong channel, the remedy must lie on the contrary side ; in considering the gospel, as the lesson of every particular man, which he is required

quired to study for himself, and apply to the peculiarities of his own situation. This remedy is easy, and would be effectual, if men could be persuaded to acquit themselves with fidelity and vigour. For the christian revelation was not given in vain; though certain appearances, even in protestant communities, are difficult to account for, if it may not be granted, that some things utterly insignificant, perhaps relishing strongly of corruption, have usurped the place and name of the most essential christian graces, and by that means superseded them.

The inefficacy of learning Christianity by systems and formularies of man's device, is strikingly pictured in that shocking immorality and profligacy, which deform the public manners. Human traditions have at all times been destructive to revealed religion; by this means the *Jews made the word of God of no effect*, and our Saviour's rebuke holds forth an awful warning to all succeeding generations,



tions, “ *In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*” Let us reverence the voice of the blessed Jesus, speaking in his father’s name, and bring all our religious practices and opinions to the test of “ God’s written word.” It is the ordinance of our own church, that we should so try them; and if it be true, that Christianity lies expiring in a deluge of wickedness and prophaneness, it is surely high time, that we should have recourse to the most effectual means of reviving it, that almighty word, which gave it life at first. If this be done with a diligence proportioned to our obligation, we may hope the happiest consequences, to see the principles of love, peace, gentleness, purity, and godliness planted in all hearts, and cultivated with a full conviction of their importance. The change could not fail of being speedy and glorious, if the gospel be in truth, what the Apostle calls it, *The power of God unto salvation.*

Let

Let us, my brethren, be ever ready to set the good example ; let every man of us take the sacred volume in his hands ; let us study it with unabating attention, with a fixed resolution to obey its precepts and doctrines, to be guided by them and them only. The call to us is authoritative, *he that hath ears to hear, let him hear*, not the sophisticated interpretation of frail men, biaſſed, perhaps, by worldly respects, but the genuine voice of Christ himself : The condition of the neglectful hearer is emphatically expressed, *ye therefore hear not my word, because you are not of God* ; and in the scriptures only are we sure to find that word pure and uncorrupted.

In a case so important to our everlasting interests, emulation will be glorious. Let us excite it in one another. Let it be excited in us all by the earnest exhortation of Moses, when he calls forth the assiduity of the Jew for the perfect understanding of his law. "*These words,*"  
says



says he, "*shall be in thine heart ; thou  
 " shalt teach them diligently unto thy chil-  
 " dren, and shalt talk of them, when thou  
 " sittest in thine house, and when thou walk-  
 " est by the way, when thou liest down, and  
 " when thou risest up. Thou shalt bind them  
 " for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall  
 " be as frontlets between thine eyes ; thou  
 " shalt write them upon the posts of thy  
 " house, and upon thy gate."* Shall all this  
 be done for the Jewish law ? What was  
 it ? It was, indeed, good, and just, and  
 holy. But yet what was it in compari-  
 son of the Gospel ? It was established on  
 temporal promises, and afforded no hope  
 of a future life. It was, indeed, the  
*School-master to bring that nation unto*  
 Christ ; but yet it was, as St. Paul calls  
 it, *a bondage of beggarly elements and car-*  
*nal ordinances*, a burden not to be en-  
 dured. And shall the Jew be thus care-  
 ful to secure temporal success, health,  
 and length of days, by an anxious study  
 of so slavish a law : And shall not the  
 Christian

Christian be equally careful of *the perfect law of liberty* ; equally anxious about the gracious covenant that stipulates for him, not length of days in a miserable world, but redemption from the power of death, and a glorious *kingdom, that passeth not away* ?

It will not acquit you, that you hear the gospel propounded and explained by your teachers. They may have mistaken, or prejudiced conceptions of it, and handle the word weakly or deceitfully : They are fallible men at best, and amenable to the written word ; by which it is your duty to try their doctrines and their spirit. They shall bear their own sins, but they shall not bear yours too. God, in his righteous judgment, shall separate what your better diligence might have rectified, and make you answerable, as unprofitable servants, for the talents he gave you to improve. The sacred character they bear, and the relation they stand in to the brotherhood of Christ, will  
aggravate



aggravate the guilt of their neglect; but will the severity of their punishment afford you any consolation, when you lament consequences, which your own eyes ought to have seen, and your own caution prevented? Be it your glory, as it will be your safety, that, if they should unhappily act upon reasons of worldly wisdom, of avarice, ambition, indolence, or superstition, you can walk by your own light, and travel in the road of salvation, with assurance and alacrity; if they should be actuated by an abject fear of those, *who can only kill the body*, that you fear him alone, whose displeasure issues in the destruction of the soul.

What you learn by your own diligence, that is effectually yours; it will work a conviction never to be erased, and afford you effectual comfort and support in all your difficulties and distresses; a compleat armour in the hour of temptation. It will enable you to wrestle victoriously against principalities and powers,  
against

against all spiritual and worldly wickedness. *The shield of faith, and the breastplate of righteousness*, thus put on, will never fail; but at all times, and in all cases, render you superior to every annoyance.

You will suppose, perhaps, that to gain this intimate acquaintance with the scriptures, will be an affair of much labour, and devour more of your time than you can conveniently spare. Let me, I beseech you, ask you one serious question. What were you sent for into this world, and what is your most material concern in it? All of you are ready to answer, to learn the will of our Creator, and to procure an interest in him by our obedience, with respect to a better life of eternal duration. This difficulty therefore is removed; your most important concern demands your first care. But the objection is in itself highly frivolous. If you acquaint yourselves with the true state of the gospel covenant, you will learn  
to



to be ferious, grave, sober, and orderly ; and when the time, which is now swallowed up in the pursuit of vicious pleasures and idle extravagances, is restored to you, you will have enough to answer all the calls of religious enquiry. You will be at liberty to prosecute your several occupations with greater diligence, and you will find the sweetest refreshment in those hours, which you appropriate to the great business of your everlasting state.

It has been objected, that sending men thus severally to examine the scriptures for themselves, will be setting up so many religions, as there are men. If it is so, how shall we help it? If God hath so commanded, *who art thou, that repliest against God?* But in fact this objection is a childish Bugbear, which crafty men have invented to frighten cowards: For it would be making so many good and real Christians, as there are particular sincere enquirers ; it would be

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setting

setting God's gracious counfels in the loveliest view, by erecting a kingdom of truth and righteousness on earth; it would purify all hearts, and fill them with affections of gratitude towards God, and *good will towards men*. The light of revelation would then shine forth with glorious lustre, if it could be thus made to *enlighten every man that cometh into the world*, and receive a full display, by a general exemplification of all christian graces.

We need fear no divisions nor dissensions; the bonds of peace and love would be drawn close, and nothing would be able to dissolve them; while each man would be reaching forward to the everlasting prize, and fired with the animating emulation of *making his own calling and election sure*.

The fundamental points of Christianity are clearly revealed beyond a possibility of mistake, if we go to the contemplation of them with minds properly disposed and prepared. We have assurance,  
that



that Christ taught the *whole will of his father*, that the *whole counsel of God* has been fully declared. The plain consequence therefore is, that, if there are points, about which good and serious men disagree, either these points are of small moment, or it was not intended, that all should have explicit conceptions of them. For the whole counsel can never be revealed, if any thing universally material be left obscure or uncertain. But be this as it may, surely nothing ought to hinder, why we should not most especially attend to what is confessedly written for all ; yea, written for the poor more particularly, in preference to others ; for unlearned, and simple men, whose minds are untrained to philosophical disquisitions, and who could never be saved, if their salvation depended on the laborious deductions of abstracted reasoners. He, who feeds on the bread of life, cannot eat to his destruction, except he poison it with foreign mixtures.

Whatever therefore might happen with respect to certain less material points, there would still be *one Faith, one Hope, one God and Father of all, and one Lord Jesus Christ*; and the Christian brotherhood would still walk together in the same road of spiritual discipline, and knock at the same strait gate for admittance into the kingdom of purified spirits: And if this be not Christian unity, it is of infinitely more value, than all that Hypocritical consent, which force and penalties, and human terrors have ever been, or ever will be, able to effect.

If we be reminded of some wild opinions, that started up in the times of the reformers, and brought much scandal on the reformation itself, the fact shall be granted. This was a natural, though an unhappy effect of a glorious cause. Men, who had long groaned under the oppression of an infernal Tyranny, became giddy in the greedy enjoyment of religious liberty. Blinded, persecuted,



secuted, and led astray, as they had cruelly been, they pursued every glimpse of light with an irresistible ecstasy; and having few stores of sound knowledge of their own, and receiving none from their predecessors, it was not wonderful, that they sometimes mistook a meteor for the sun; nay, not even that the very wisest of them should do so. The complexion of the present times however is widely different; enured to a strong and steady light, and hardened by exercise, the mental eye cannot be greatly liable to be deluded by a vapour. If some extravagances should break out, there is a combined force of learning and rational acquirements to oppose them, such as no age or nation ever saw before. But as an answer to this objection absolutely decisive, and to which no possible reply can be made, let it be considered, that if the divine wisdom is unable to conduct men in the track of sober truth, human wisdom is infinitely less able; that,

that, whatever God has made our duty, it belongs not to us to forebode consequences, but to bow in confidential submission to his will.

If the scriptures are not to be studied and understood by particular Christians, why are they not still locked up in the darkness of a dead language? Or, if they are to be understood consistently with any human interpretation, howsoever or by what authority soever established, are they not, in effect, still locked up with respect to particular Christians? Would not this be taking away the key of knowledge? Or, while they are in your own hands, in a language intelligible to you all, if you will regulate your conduct and opinions by human maxims and interpretations, is not this throwing it away; and deriving upon yourselves the guilt, which our Saviour charged on the Pharisees of old; which falls heavily on the proud rulers of the Popish Church, and must fall equally



qually on others, if any there are, who presume to exercise the same lordship over the heritage of God?

Every way therefore the obligation is upon you to read, to learn and understand for yourselves. The more attentively you apply, the greater profit you will reap. Consider the sacred books, as the great Charter of immortal life, and you will want no motive to encourage you to the task. One requisite you have heard you must bring with you, a mind perfectly unprejudiced, and detached from every thing that may warp it: You must be disposed to receive the whole word in its full force, without making exceptions for any favourite practice or opinion, without relaxation in the severity of the discipline. Whatever God teaches, you must receive, and suffer it to mold and fashion your affections to a perfect conformity with the spirit of the gospel.

If you come thus disposed, you will  
find

find daily improvement, and daily comforts springing up within you. If you come thus disposed, your evidence and your lights will grow daily stronger: For it is not written in vain, *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.* The precept therefore must be taken, as it lies, in its full latitude; that the world has made abatements and deviations, is nothing to you; *the world is at enmity with God*; and if you could have been saved by the maxims and opinions of the world, there could have been no occasion for a divine revelation.

*Search the scriptures, how is it written? how readest thou?* is the uniform language of the sacred writings. In these you have the most express commands for purity, sanctification, and integrity: You have likewise the severest prohibitions of drunkenness, lying, swearing, adultery, hypocrisy, and worldly wisdom; of every kind and every appearance of evil: You  
have



have the most emphatical denunciations, *that they, who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* If you know of any exceptions or limitations, let them be produced. The fact is, there are none, which you can produce; and he only can be safe, who receives and practises the truth as he finds it in the oracles of God.

**F I N I S.**

